



The Education Trust—Midwest

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 5526, an important and long-overdue measure for ensuring that parents and community leaders have honest, accessible and meaningful information about the quality of their local schools. I am Brian Gutman, Director of External Relations at The Education Trust-Midwest.

The Education Trust-Midwest is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Royal Oak and Grand Rapids, committed to the high academic achievement for all Michigan students. As a data-driven education policy, research and advocacy organization, we are focused first and foremost on doing what is right for Michigan's children, working with partners across the state to raise the quality of teaching and learning in our public schools.

Michigan's recent educational history should serve as a cautionary tale for what happens when a state does not hold schools accountable for educating students, does not honestly and clearly communicate information on school quality to parents, or does these things poorly. And Michigan's track-record should trigger a conversation like this one – on how we can better ensure that the needs of students are met moving forward.

For more than fifteen years, the quality of education in Michigan has quickly declined from about average to the national bottom. This impacts every group of students, no matter their family income, race or disability status:

- Michigan ranks last for African American students in early literacy;
- Second to last for white students in early literacy;
- Third to last for higher income students in early literacy;
- Fourth to last for low-income students in fourth-grade math; and
- Fifth to last for Latino students in fourth-grade math.

And during this time, parents and community leaders have largely been left in the dark about the quality of their local schools because of a lack of reliable, transparent and meaningful accountability information. In contrast, during the same time, the leading education states of today were exposing their own educational challenges and focusing on improvement.

The proposed accountability system moves Michigan in the right direction by shining a light on what is already going well in our schools, as well as identifying where much more work is needed. It uses very clear indicators of school quality – letter grades – which are broadly understood and are the overwhelming preference of parents. All of our students benefit when we make this information easy to understand and accessible to parents.

Perhaps most importantly, this bill focuses on what matters most. It uses academic and other measures that are well supported by research to predict student success, both in K-12, and in life and education after a student graduates high school. This proposal combines both the right metrics and the right ratings to clearly, effectively and accurately communicate about school success.

This good proposal can be made even better through two improvements. We should strengthen this proposal by summarizing the metrics included into one single letter grade that communicates overall academic quality in a more clear and concise way. We also strongly encourage the committee to improve how groups of students – subgroups – are incorporated into the proposed system, to ensure that a school's ratings truly reflect the educational quality offered to every group of students within the school.

Again, we thank the Chair and members of this committee for addressing such a critical issue and look forward to further strengthening this good proposal. This legislation is an important step toward Michigan's educational transformation. It is desperately needed and this is a great place to begin.

Thank you